

Contributed

THE OUTLOOK OF RELIGION IN FRANCE.

This statement, you will note, is amongst the "proverbs." It is proverbially true. Where there is no vision the people must perish. "Vision" here is equivalent to prophecy in its widest sense—the revelation of God's will to men.

The words "prophecy" and "prophet" are not usually received by us in their primary significance or in the sense in which they are commonly used in the scriptures. We speak of a prophet as one who foretells future events, but literally a prophet is one who speaks for another. Thus Christ Jesus is our Great Prophet. Jonah was a prophet when he obeyed the command, "Go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." Peter was also a prophet and so accepted by Cornelius, when he fulfilled his mission after Cornelius said to him, "Now therefore, we are all here present, before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." The revelation of ancient times was not continuous and uninterrupted, but came at intervals, between which there was at times great darkness. It was so in the days of Eli, as we see in I Sam. 3:1. And under Asa's reign, 2 Chron. 15:3, and in the days of Ahaz.

We see the importance of prophecy in regulating the lives and the religion of men and nations. The fearful result is not affected by the occasion of the lack of vision. Where there is no vision the people perish, whether the people have put the vision from them, or the vision has been kept from them by others.

There are lessons just here for us in the study of the Watchman on the walls of the city as Ezekiel tells us in 33:1-6. We therefore who have the vision are to give it to others who have not. "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord." "Go ye," said our Lord, "into all the world and preach the gospel." This truth is further set forth in Romans 10:13-15. The church of the Lord Jesus must be evangelistic, if it is anything. If it ceases to be evangelistic, as has been repeatedly observed, it will cease to be evangelical, and if not evangelical, it is anything else than a witness of the pure gospel.

A striking illustration of this truth is seen in the contrast between the people of France and those of Britain, just across the narrow channel, or between the cities of Paris and Glasgow. There is probably no where to be found a more honest, upright and generally wholesome municipal government, than that of Glasgow, and the contrast between the spirituality and general welfare of its citizens and the condition, civil and religious, of Paris, is as proverbial as the text, well nigh. The motto of Glasgow is, "Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the Word," and Glasgow has flourished by the preaching of the Word, while in France the preaching of the Word is well nigh unknown. France has been the ground of many and most remarkable changes for years past, and lately it has witnessed what has been denominated the most momentous event

in its history since the days of the Revolution, not excepting the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes or the passing of the Concordat in 1806.

On the 12th of December, 1905, the union of church and state was broken, and the church in all its branches was cast upon its own resources. The results of the disestablishment are said to be of the most serious nature to all concerned. The Roman Catholic church of France, which for ages has shown its great loyalty to the Roman Pontiff, lost all the support hitherto received from the government, some 4,000,000 pounds sterling annually, and in consequence of the Pope's "non possumus" attitude, in opposition to the majority of the French bishops and archbishops assembled in council, they have lost all their church property. They have lost their vested funds, amounting to something like \$100,000,000 capital. They have lost all their churches, which they can use, but no more own; their income from the celebration of masses for the dead is denied them, and their fees from baptismal, marriage and funeral ceremonies.

The small body of Protestants also lost their annual income from the government, of about 80,000 pounds sterling. It is said that from a pecuniary point of view the losses of the Roman Catholics have been nothing short of a disaster. But great as this material loss has been, the moral harm done to the cause of the church by the Pope's decision, is considered even greater. "There cannot be the slightest doubt that the sovereign pontiff's interference in a question which was pre-eminently French, and the obligation laid down by him, has been resented by a large number of the most intelligent, the most cultured and influential lay members of the church, to say nothing of the clergy." Says one who writes from a sympathetic standpoint, "But worse even than the dissatisfaction and estrangement among the sincere Catholics, has been the feeling that has got abroad among the masses of the people, that on account of the rejection of a law that deprived them of no essential liberty, the Roman church is decidedly a thing of the past and that she is unable to adapt herself to the necessities of the present, and to the democratic aspirations of a great republic.

We can scarcely think of France from a religious standpoint and not think of Romanism. It has been the favored garden of the Pope for generations past. But in the wonderful changes going on there, the question is a pertinent one, Is France today a Roman Catholic country? A Roman Catholic priest, Abbe X, writing in the "Avant Garde" (February 15, 1906), answers the question. He says: "France is no more Catholic. There are in France a few thousands of pious souls, some thousands more have religious habits, or rather, habits of worship; but the masses are irreligious. They are detached and forever from Catholicism. There is no hope of a conquest of the French people by Rome. That religious restoration is as impossible as that of the Bourbon or Napoleonic monarchy. To be sure of this one need only to consider with what placid indifference the people of France have accepted the Disestablishment of the Churches. It is finished; it is better so. We Roman Catholics have abused public credulity,